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Project Title: ETHICAL ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH

Description:

This is a project of the Harvard School of Public Health in collaboration with Tufts University Medical School; Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica, Cuernavaca, Mexico; The University of Natal School of Medicine, Durban, South Africa; and the Achutha Menon Centre for Medical and Social Sciences, of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India.

The three-year project was funded to develop a series of domestic and international workshops/courses on "Ethical Issues in International Health Research" and educational materials to be used in these workshops. Research ethics as practiced in the US and as written in international guidelines are not always well understood or applicable within other cultures, in poor countries, and/or in societies with very different health problems. In research programs where funding and scientists come from the developed to the developing world it is particularly important that areas of agreement, differences, and potential conflict be fully explored.

Three courses were planned for the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) with the first being held in June 1999. The course was designed for the following groups: researchers; funding officials from government, foundations and industry; and research managers and IRB members. Members of the interdisciplinary faculty included physicians, ethicists, public health specialists, lawyers, and anthropologists, many with extensive experience working in developing countries. The course was highly rated by the forty-two participants (from 14 countries). Tuition scholarships were provided with preference given to participants from developing countries. The next course at HSPH will be held from 12-16 June 2000.

International courses will be directed and developed by the three collaborating institutions, making use of the course materials and experience of the first course at HSPH. The South African course will be held outside of Durban from 16-21 July, immediately following the International AIDS Conference in Durban. Mexico will hold its course in early November and will recruit participants from throughout Latin America. The India course is scheduled for the last week of January 2001 and will focus on ethical issues that of are particular concern to India and the other countries of South Asia. A commissioned paper has reviewed the present state of research ethics in India and was the basis for a brainstorming session held in Delhi to discuss the content and orientation of the Kerala workshop.

Each workshop participant receives a book of readings recommended by faculty. The fourteen cases developed for the case discussions will form the core of a casebook and teaching guide for international research ethics. The JFK School of Government at Harvard has produced an interactive CD ROM on the ethical issues of the AZT trials in pregnant women in developing countries. The effectiveness of this teaching tool is being evaluated. An interactive case is being produced this year on the responsibility of researchers to the community. Lastly we have created a website to provide general information and a forum to discuss the cases and questions in research ethics.

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